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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 38TH INFANTRY  
(2d INFANTRY DIVISION) DURING THE BATTLE  
FOR BREST, FRANCE, 4 SEPTEMBER - 20  
SEPTEMBER 1944.

(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander).

Type of operation described: CITY FIGHTING.

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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 38TH INFANTRY  
(2d INFANTRY DIVISION) DURING THE BATTLE FOR  
BREST, FRANCE, 8 SEPTEMBER - 10 SEPTEMBER 1944.  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company B, 38th Infantry, 2d Infantry Division, from 8 September through 10 September 1944, during the battle for Brest, France.

The events leading up to this operation began during the last week of July 1944, when the American First Army penetrated the enemy defenses in the hedgerows west of St. Lo. Subsequent to that breakthrough American armor and motorized infantry advanced rapidly to the east, south and west. In the Brittany Peninsula these forces found the enemy concentrating what strength he could at the key cities of St. Malo, Brest, Lorient and St. Nazaire. The existing defenses of these cities were being strengthened in an attempt to deny the vitally needed port facilities to the allies. (1)

At this time all allied operations in France were being sustained by supplies received across the beaches or through the limited port facilities of Cherbourg. Since supplies thus received would be inadequate to support future operations, orders were issued for the capture of Brest. (2)

Brest had served as the major port of the American Army during the first World War, and at the beginning of World War II it was France's chief naval port. (3)

Elements of the 6th Armored Division reached the out-

(1) A-1, p. 21; (2) A-1, p. 23; (3) A-1, p. 23.

skirts of the city on 6 August 1944, however, the enemy garrison quickly repulsed this advance and it was immediately apparent that a strong infantry force would be required to capture the city. (4) Accordingly, the VIII Corps was given that mission. (5) Combat Command A of the 6th Armored Division was ordered to contain the city, pending the arrival of other units. (6)

The enemy garrison was composed of approximately 50,000 troops commanded by Major General Hermon B. Von Ramcke. (7) Elements of the 2d Parachute Division, 266th Infantry Division, and the 343d Infantry Division were included in this force as well as personnel from miscellaneous military and naval units. (8) It was estimated that the enemy defenses included eleven battalions of field artillery whose fires could be reinforced by the fourteen inch coastal defense guns. (9)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The VIII Corps plan of attack consisted of simultaneous attacks by the 29th Division from the northwest, the 8th Division from the north and the 2d Division from the northeast. (10) Task Force A was constituted and given the mission of capturing the Crozon Peninsula. Task Force B, which consisted of the 38th Regimental Combat Team reinforced, was ordered to capture the Daoulas Peninsula. Preparations for the attack included the issuance of an enemy situation map by the VIII Corps G-2.

- (4) A-1, p. 23 ; (5) A-1, p. 27;  
(6) A-4, p. 33; (7) A-2, p. 51; (8) A-1, p. 27;  
(9) A-5 Arty Sec p. 4; (10) A-1, p. 25.

The map gave the location of all known enemy positions including minefields, barbed wire entanglements, trenches, pillboxes, artillery, and in some cases even the numerical strength of enemy strongpoints. Distribution of this map was made through company level. (11)

The attack began on 25 August 1944, and bitter enemy resistance was immediately encountered. The area around Brest contained one of the heaviest concentrations of anti-aircraft weapons on the European continent. These weapons were located, for the most part, on the high ground around the city and the enemy cleverly utilized direct fire from them to support his defensive positions. The positions consisted of strong points, generally mutually supporting, manned by 50 to 100 infantrymen who were well protected in extensive trenches, dugouts and pillboxes. The approaches to the strong points were normally covered by minefields and barbed wire entanglements. (12)

The resistance encountered by attacking elements when they actually assaulted these positions differed greatly. If the defenders were either paratroopers or marine personnel, they would usually fight to the last man. However, if they happened to be personnel from some miscellaneous unit which had been hastily reorganized as infantry, they might surrender en mass when hand to hand fighting became imminent. (13)

During the period 25 August to 5 September 1944, slow but continuous advances were made. The three divisions pushed forward to the approximate edge of the city proper. Task Force A made some progress on Crozon Peninsula and

(11) A-2, p. 57-63 and Personal Knowledge; (12) A-2, p. 57-63 and Personal Knowledge; (13) Personal Knowledge.

Task Force B cleared the Daoulas Peninsula after which the 38th Infantry reverted to 2d Division control. (14)

The possession of the Daoulas Peninsula was exploited by an organization created from units of the 2d Division operating under control of the Division Artillery. This organization was given the mission of close support of the advance upon the city of Brest and utilized, in the accomplishment of its mission, heavy machine guns, 3 inch tank destroyer guns, and 40mm antiaircraft guns. Christened "Ivory X", it expended over 300,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition and 2600 rounds of high explosive before it was disbanded on 10 September 1944. (15)

By 5 September, a shortage of Artillery ammunition necessitated a short pause in the attack. The shortage was quickly alleviated and orders were issued for all units to resume the attack on 8 September 1944. (16)

The 2d Division ordered the attack made by two regiments, the 38th Infantry on the right and the 23d Infantry on the left. (17)

#### THE COMPANY SITUATION

B Company, 38th Infantry was composed at this time of four officers and approximately 142 enlisted men. The company commander and about 35% of the men were original members of the company which had landed on Omaha Beach on D plus 1. The remainder were replacements who had varying amounts of battle experience. Morale and esprit de corps were high as a result of two recent attacks which had been extremely successful. Communication equipment was limited to that provided by Tables of Organization and Equipment.

(14) A-4, p. 42-64;

(15) A-2, p. 56; (16) A-2, p. 56; (17) A-2, p. 50.

The company's fire power had been increased by the addition of one .45 cal submachine gun per rifle squad. (18)

On the night of 4-5 September 1944, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry, relieved 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, in positions on the front line. The relief was accomplished without incident. The battalion was disposed with B and C companies on the line, B Company on the right. The right flank of B Company was tied in with elements of the 121st Infantry, 8th Division.

The Battalion Commander had informed the company commanders that an attack would be made from this position sometime in the near future. Preparations for the attack were begun immediately. Reconnaissance patrols were sent out during the following two days and night. The patrols established the enemy position to be along the sunken road about 150 to 250 yards to the front. The flanks of the enemy position could not be located as they ran continuously across Company B's front and into the area of adjacent units on the right and left. Several hedgerows crossed the area between the enemy position and B Company's front line. The patrols had utilized these hedgerows for cover, and they had received no fire from the enemy until they were within one field of his position. Indications were that no security elements had been posted in front of the main position. (19)

The battalion attack order was issued 7 September 1944. The battalion would attack at 0900 8 September 1944, with B and C Companies abreast, B Company on the right. The order was accompanied by an overlay which

- (18) Personal knowledge and statement of 1st Sgt. C.A. Poulton, then 1st Sgt. B Company, 38th Infantry, on January 17, 1948. (19) Personal opinion.



gave the battalion and company boundaries and objectives. The final objective was on the bank of the river inside the fortified wall which surrounded the old portion of the city. To reach the objective, the battalion would first have to cross approximately 1800 yards of fairly open farm country, then traverse more than 2800 yards of closely built up area and finally find a way over or through the wall.

#### THE COMPANY PLAN OF ATTACK

The company commander decided to attack with the 2d platoon on the right and the 3d platoon on the left. The 1st platoon in support would follow the 2d platoon by bounds and maintain contact with the 121st Infantry on the right. The 60mm mortar section would support the attack initially from its present position. Since no suitable firing positions were available, the light machine gun section was ordered to advance between the two assault platoons, and the heavy machine gun platoon from D Company, which had been attached to B Company for the attack, was ordered to follow the 2d platoon.

The enemy position in the sunken road would be covered by artillery preparatory fires, and the two assault platoon leaders were instructed to move forward as rapidly as possible in order to assault before the enemy could recover from the effects of the fire. The 60mm mortars, already registered on the enemy position, were ordered to be prepared to fire heavy concentrations on call.

The enemy situation map was studied to determine the location of other enemy positions in the company's zone of action. Hill 100, the city wall, and one position about half way between the two were shown as deliberately organized

positions. These locations were pointed out to the officers and noncommissioned officers of the company and tentative plans were discussed for their capture.

The maps which were available to the company included, in addition to the enemy situation map, one 1/50,000, six 1/25,000, and six 1/10,000. The latter had been prepared by the 2d Division Engineer Battalion. The company communications sergeant took them to battalion headquarters the day before the attack and, under the guidance of the Battalion S-2, he placed on each map code numbers for each city block, cross road, field, bridge, and wooded area in or near the company zone of action. This system, which was standard throughout the division, permitted any unit to report its location and the location of any enemy resistance by radio in the clear.

The supply sergeant issued ammunition to the platoons. Each man was to carry a full belt, 2 bandoleers, and 5 hand grenades. The grenades available to the company included 100 white phosphorus which were distributed equally among the rifle platoons. The supply sergeant was also ordered to have one weapons carrier with 200 additional grenades as well as machine gun, BAR, rifle, and sub-machine gun ammunition follow the company as closely as possible. Each platoon had cerise air identification panels to display as the entire operation had enjoyed close air support.

Orders were issued for each man to fire on his own initiative into every area known or suspected to contain enemy, and to reply with a heavy volume of fire whenever he was fired upon. Attention was directed to the large amount of ammunition carried by each member of the company,

as well as the weapons carrier which would be available for immediate resupply.

Approximately 4 hours of daylight were available to the platoon leaders for their plans and orders. This time was utilized to allow each man to study the map and familiarize himself with the part his squad and platoon would play in the attack. (20)

THE ATTACK ON 8 SEPTEMBER 1944  
(See Map C)

The attack the following morning was preceded by a short artillery preparation and fire from a platoon of tank destroyers which had been attached to the battalion and retained under battalion control. Part of the tank destroyer fire from positions to the rear of the assault companies was inadvertantly directed at the one building in B Company's area. The building contained the company observation post and the 81mm mortar platoon observation post. Several casualties, including the artillery forward observer, were suffered. The fire was lifted after a call to battalion and the company crossed the line of departure on time, minus the services of an artillery forward observer.

The assault platoons did not draw enemy small arms fire until they were one field (approximately 50 yards) away from the enemy position. Almost immediately, heavy mortar and artillery fire fell on the low ground about 100 yards in front of the enemy position. The fire fell on the company command group who immediately took cover behind the nearest hedgerow. The firing from the 3d platoon increased in volume and the light machine gun section also

(20) Personal Knowledge.

joined in the fire fight. Under cover of their own fire, the platoon assaulted the sunken road, quickly overrunning it and the field immediately behind it. Approximately 15 prisoners were taken and several enemy dead were observed. The left squad of the 3d platoon overran an enemy mortar position, capturing two 81mm mortars and killing the crews.

The 2d platoon, meanwhile, had not been as successful. Their initial assault had been repulsed and the lead squads had suffered five casualties. The platoon leader requested 60mm mortar fire on the enemy position which was promptly delivered. The company commander decided to go forward and look over the 2d platoon's front. While moving forward, he was slightly wounded and received immediate first aid from one of the medical aid men. At this time the 3d platoon sergeant reported that one of the prisoners could speak English and had stated that all the enemy force wanted to surrender, but that their officer would not let them do so. He requested permission to investigate this situation. Permission was granted. Taking the prisoner with him, he moved to a position in the sunken road near the flank of the remaining enemy. Protected by a slight curve in the road, they yelled to the enemy to drop their arms and come out with their hands up. Several did so and the sergeant then requested that the mortar fire be lifted from the rest of the position. This was done. The enemy officer immediately jumped into the center of the sunken road and shot one of his men who was walking out with his hands up. The sergeant shot the officer and the remainder of the enemy force crawled out of their holes, only too glad to quit. Between 40 and 50 prisoners were taken in

this area, many of them wounded by the artillery and mortar fire. The mortar fire had been particularly accurate. Some 200 rounds had been fired and at least 25% had fallen in the sunken road, the rest exploding in the fields immediately to the rear. (21)

The 3d platoon needed additional ammunition which was distributed. Battalion was contacted by radio and informed of the progress made. Orders were received to continue the attack without delay.

A visual reconnaissance was made by the company commander of the area to the front. The hedgerows extended only one or two fields beyond the sunken road. After leaving them, the company would be exposed to enemy observation and fire as it crossed several hundred yards of open hillside. Rifle and machine gun fire could be heard from the left in C Company's area and from the right in the 121st Infantry's zone of action, however no enemy were visible and no fire was being received in the area now occupied by B Company.

The 60 mm mortar section was ordered to displace forward and occupy positions in or near the sunken road recently captured. The machine gun platoon from D Company was ordered to take up positions on the last hedgerow and both units were instructed to cover the company's advance across the open ground. The advance was delayed until these weapons were in position.

The advance was unopposed, however, and the company soon reached the group of buildings on the road running into the city. These were checked and found to be unoc-

(21) Personal knowledge and statement of 1st Lt. George H. Bundy, retired, then Weapons Platoon Leader, B Company, 38th Infantry, on January 11, 1948.

cupied. It was now necessary to change slightly the company's direction of attack. This was done and the advance continued toward the city with one platoon on each side of the road. The rate of the advance was controlled by battalion and at 1800 hours, after a total advance of about 1400 yards, orders were received to halt for the night.

C Company Commander reported by radio that he did not like to stop the advance on the ground he now held. His company was in low ground and, since the enemy was not contesting the advance, he suggested moving forward approximately 300 yards to higher ground. B Company Commander agreed and battalion was requested to authorize this advance. Permission was quickly forthcoming and the two companies moved forward. During this advance a salvo of 4 rounds from the coastal defense guns fell on the 2d platoon. Eleven casualties resulted leaving the platoon with 17 men. No other fire was received, although the high ground had been prepared by the enemy for a deliberate defense. These positions were unoccupied and the company advanced beyond them, digging in for the night with a platoon on each side of the road. The light machine gun section was placed on the road and the heavy machine gun platoon occupied positions to cover the right flank. On the left, the company was tied in with C company.

The company commander returned to battalion headquarters, which had been installed in a farm house, and received orders to continue the attack at 0900 the following morning. Rations and ammunition were issued. The 1st platoon was ordered to pass through the 2d platoon the following morning and take over its assault mission.

Shortly after midnight the guard at the light machine gun position detected the approach of a group of people. He alerted the section. After the guns were manned and the advancing group had been allowed to approach within 50 feet of the position, a challenge was called out. The reply was in German. Both guns opened up immediately. After four belts had been fired, cries of surrender were heard. A somewhat startled machine gun section collected over 40 prisoners in an action that had not lasted over half an hour. The enemy had been marching down the road in a column with no security elements proceeding him. Many of the prisoners were wounded and numerous dead were noted the following morning. (22) It is believed that these enemy had intended to occupy the position which had been overrun the previous evening and were not aware of the extent of the battalion's advance. (23)

THE ATTACK ON 9 SEPTEMBER 44  
(See Map D)

The attack the following morning initially was not opposed and an advance of approximately 400 yards was made into the residential area of the city before any enemy fire was received. However, since it was necessary to check every building, much time was consumed. In addition, the buildings rendered the use of SCR536 radios impossible and a great deal of difficulty was experienced in controlling the various elements of the company. Individual soldiers assigned specific buildings to clear were inclined to give too much consideration to the contents of dresser (22) Personal Knowledge. (23) Personal Opinion.

drawers rather than possible enemy personnel in the house.

After this advance, the buildings thinned out and the 3d platoon on the left came under fire from enemy positions on the west side of Hill 100. The hill ran generally east and west across the regimental zone of advance. B Company, on the right flank of the regiment, would have to cross the west nose of the hill. The advance of the platoon ceased as the men returned the enemy fire. The platoon sergeant, platoon leader, and the company commander attempted to locate the enemy positions exactly so that supporting fire could be accurately placed.

At this time, four P-47 Fighter Bombers were seen circling the area at a low altitude, and as a precautionary measure, the air identification panels were displayed. The planes circled twice more, then came in low across the company's front from right to left with all guns firing. This pass was a little too close, and two men in the 1st platoon were wounded by the planes' fire. However, the enemy stopped firing and the company moved forward about 50 yards with the air identification panels prominently displayed. Then the planes returned for a second run. This time the fire was well ahead of the leading platoons and the advance continued. A third run was made by the planes before they departed. Under cover of this fire, B Company had advanced to the enemy position. The enemy defenders were found to be disorganized by the strafing. The 3d platoon began to clear the enemy from his trenches and dugouts. A few small groups offered resistance and the platoon advanced slowly across the nose of the hill



and started down the far side. The 1st platoon, in the low ground on the right of the company's zone of action, advanced abreast of the 3d platoon without opposition.

The enemy position on the west side of Hill 100 had consisted of extensive trenches, dugouts, concrete troop shelters, and two batteries of AA guns, one 40mm, and one 88mm. However, the air corps and artillery had seriously damaged the position prior to B Company's attack. The final strafing had driven the defenders underground and for the most part they remained there until dug out by the men of the 3d platoon. Over 100 prisoners were taken in this area. While it was generally regretted that the planes' initial fire had resulted in two casualties in the 1st platoon, the members of the company were in agreement that casualties would have been more numerous had the planes not made such a timely appearance.

Orders were received from battalion to halt the advance on the first north-south street which crossed the company area on the far side of Hill 100. At the time the order was received, the 3d Platoon was meeting increased resistance. Small groups of enemy armed with rifles and machine guns were making a determined stand in the ruined buildings which covered the platoon front. Aggressive leadership on the part of the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and the squad leaders enabled the platoon to continue its advance. The light machine gun section and the D company machine gun platoon gave superior fire support to this action. The tactics employed were simple but effective. When the enemy fired, everyone returned the fire and continued to do so until one of

the leaders could move two or three men into grenade throwing distance. The assault element usually contained at least one man armed with a BAR or a submachine gun. In such an action the 3d platoon leader was killed and the platoon sergeant took command. He continued to work the platoon forward and in so doing actually went one block further than Battalion had ordered. No prisoners were taken during this action.

The platoon was now located along the second north south street and was receiving scattered rifle and machine gun fire from the enemy side of the street. The platoon sergeant designated a number of men who selected positions to return the fire.

The 1st platoon had advanced to the same street occupied by the 3d platoon without serious opposition. However, artillery fire had been received and caused three casualties, including the platoon sergeant who was acting platoon leader. The platoon guide took command.

At approximately 1800 hours, orders were received from battalion to hold the present position for the night. The company commander returned to the 3d platoon area and found little improvement in the situation there. Individual soldiers on both sides of the street would fire two or three rounds from a window or doorway and move before a grenade or burst of machine gun fire was returned. The light machine gun section leader had been wounded and the platoon sergeant was worried about the enemy forming for a counterattack. He suggested throwing white phosphorus grenades across the street in an attempt to burn the enemy held houses, but this suggestion was discarded because the

wind was blowing toward B Company's side of the street.

The company commander attempted to adjust artillery fire on the houses which the enemy occupied. From an observation post on the second floor of a house on the street, the fire was moved in closer and closer. After three adjustments, a correction of "50 over" was given and the battery volley knocked part of the roof off the house which was being used for the observation post. It was obvious that artillery could not be adjusted close enough to the platoon to be of assistance. The 81mm mortar platoon was then requested to fire. They reported, however, that the entire platoon was engaged in supporting the attack of C Company. The situation remained unchanged and, as a precautionary measure, the company commander moved the 2d platoon into position behind the 3d platoon in case a counterattack did develop.

*1050* \* When the company commander made his nightly visit to battalion, he was ordered to continue the attack the following morning at 0800 hours. A section of tank destroyers was attached to the company and a new artillery forward observer was assigned.

The sergeant in command of the two M18 tank destroyers reported to the company command post later that night. The company commander talked over the next day's attack with him and it immediately became apparent that some means of communication between the company and the tank destroyers would have to be established. It was decided that the weapons platoon leader would furnish liaison between the company commander and the tank destroyer sergeant. In addition, he would go with the sergeant to make foot re-

connaissances to determine the best routes forward for the vehicles. The vehicles would follow the assault platoons under cover, and the weapons platoon leader or the company commander would personally show any targets to the sergeant on the ground. He would then select the best firing position, move his vehicle to it, fire the mission, and return to a covered position. The danger of antitank mines was discussed and the weapons platoon leader and the tank destroyer sergeant were cautioned to carefully inspect the routes of advance for them.

During the night, the weapons platoon leader and the tank destroyer sergeant made a reconnaissance for a route to move the vehicles into the 3d platoon area. The route was selected and the vehicles moved up to positions from which they could support the attack the following morning. During the movement, mortars and artillery fired to conceal the sound of the motors. (24)

THE ATTACK 10 SEPTEMBER 44  
(See Map E)

The attack the following morning opened with overwhelming fire cover for the 3d platoon's attack. The tank destroyers shelled every house on the enemy side of the street and the six machine guns worked over the debris. (25) The platoon moved forward and cleared the immediate enemy positions quickly. However, this proved to be the right flank of a larger position which faced to the northwest. Extensive trenches ran along the northwest side of the buildings which marked the company boundary between B and C Companies. These trenches and some of the buildings were

(24) Personal Knowledge. (25) Personal knowledge and statement of 1st Lt. George D. Bundy, retired, then Weapons Platoon Leader, B Company, 38th Infantry, on January 11, 1948.

occupied by the enemy. The 3d platoon, having overrun the flank of this position, now proceeded to move forward rapidly, rolling up the enemy defenses under cover of a heavy volume of rifle, BAR, and Machine Gun fire. White Phosphorus grenades were particularly effective in clearing buildings and underground shelters. Approximately 15 enemy were killed and 30 odd prisoners were taken in the action which lasted less than an hour.

The 2d platoon had advanced beyond the railroad which curved across the company front from left to right and had secured the knoll in the center of the company zone of action. Three enemy soldiers were captured in the buildings on this knoll. They were evidently an outpost of the position which the 3d platoon had hit. From this point, the 2d platoon advanced down the trail which ran due west toward another group of buildings some 200 yards away.

The 3d platoon, spread well out in a skirmish line, started across the open area to its front. After advancing about 200 yards and crossing the railroad it came under fire from a 20mm gun and two machine guns located southeast of the railroad at the edge of the buildings in C Company's sector. This fire prohibited forward movement of the platoon which was hugging what little cover was available in the open field.

An immediate attempt was made to bring artillery fire on the enemy guns which were easily seen from the knoll that the 2d platoon had captured. Artillery fire direction center reported that the target was too close to our own forces and they were reluctant to fire the

mission. After some discussion and a radio message from C Company Commander that his troops were nowhere near the location given, artillery did agree to fire one gun. Fire was adjusted by the artillery forward observer until he had a round within 100 yards of the target. Fire direction center refused to move the fire any closer because of their safety factor.

The company commander decided to employ the tank destroyers and called the weapons platoon leader by SCR536 radio, which fortunately was working. At the time the weapons platoon leader received the message, he and the tank destroyer sergeant had just completed making a reconnaissance for a route to bring the vehicles up behind the knoll. They had decided to come up the street which passed through the area cleared by the 1st platoon. The route was covered from the enemy 20mm gun, except for one short space. Evidently alerted by the noise of the vehicles, this weapon fired unsuccessfully at them as they crossed this space.

Meanwhile, the enemy position had been pointed out to the tank destroyer sergeant from the knoll. He quickly selected a firing position and moved one tank destroyer from behind the knoll forward to the position. The sergeant mounted the vehicle and marked the target for his gunner with a long burst from the .50 cal antiaircraft machine gun mounted in the turret. Five rounds of 76mm HE were fired and disposed of the 20mm gun and the two machine guns. The 20mm was observed sticking up at an odd angle after the smoke and dust cleared and the machine guns were silent as the third platoon continued its advance.

The advance continued without further opposition until the edge of the ravine which crossed the company front was reached. The forward platoons halted their advance along the edge of the ravine and the company commander made a visual reconnaissance of the area to the front. The ravine was not very deep and would present no obstacle to the troops, but it was exposed and all support weapons were placed in position to fire before the riflemen started forward. To cover the advance, the tank destroyers were ordered to fire at several prominent buildings on the far side of the ravine. (26)

At this time, a messenger from the 1st platoon contacted the company commander, bringing with him an English speaking frenchman who had an elaborate map of the entire city showing all enemy positions. The company commander took a brief look at the map and located two mine fields in his zone of advance which were not shown on the VIII Corps enemy situation map. Then he sent the map and the frenchman to battalion headquarters with a guide.

The 1st platoon had encountered brief resistance in a large street car barn located on the right of the company zone of action. After eliminating this, their advance continued but because the acting platoon leader was not too efficient at map reading, they wandered over into the 8th Division sector and possibly assisted that unit's advance by attacking and capturing a pillbox which had opened fire. This attack was materially assisted by the fire of one of the tank destroyers.

The company commander located the platoon, led them

(26) Personal knowledge and statement of 1st Lt. George D. Bundy, retired, then Weapons Platoon Leader, B Company, 38th Infantry, on January 11, 1948.

back to their own sector, oriented the platoon leader, and ordered him to clear the remaining buildings in front of the Wall which was now visible some 200 yards ahead.

The 3d platoon had advanced with little difficulty until they reached the last two streets before the cleared area in front of the wall. The buildings in this area were large apartment houses, warehouses, and a few hotels. The platoon's advance had been canalized into the streets by these large, long buildings. A few enemy located in the buildings were firing down the streets. The platoon was advancing from building to building, clearing each one as they progressed. White Phosphorus grenades thrown in the streets were used to screen their dashes from building to building. The enemy soon discovered the reason for the smoke screens and fired blindly into the smoke as soon as a grenade was thrown. Observing this, the platoon sergeant stationed his men where they could observe the street to the front, had one of them throw a smoke grenade, and when the enemy opened fire on the smoke, heavy fire from the 3d platoon quickly drove them under cover. Using these methods of crossing the streets, the platoon soon cleared the entire area with the exception of one large hotel located on the left of the company zone of action. This building evidently contained the remnants of the enemy force and spirited resistance was encountered when the men attempted to approach it. The enemy was finally driven from the ground floor and one squad of the 3d platoon moved in. However, the enemy had merely retreated upstairs and continued to resist by covering the stairways with fire and throwing hand grenades down the elevator shaft and



the stairways. The squad leader attempted to move up the stairs, but lost two men in the attempt. He then proceeded to demonstrate admirable initiative by setting fire to the ground floor and withdrawing the squad. In a short while, the enemy came out with their hands up. 18 prisoners were taken from this building.

It was now late in the afternoon and the company was approximately 600 yards ahead of friendly units on each flank. Battalion ordered it to hold its present position against a possible counterattack and to assist by fire the advance of C company on the left. The company organized a perimeter defense and began to plan for an attack on the Wall. The attack was not to take place for a week as it was to be delayed until all units drew abreast of B Company. (27)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analysing this successful operation, let us briefly recapitulate the company's accomplishments. It had in a minimum of time fulfilled the mission which had been assigned to it. The company advanced approximately 4400 yards capturing approximately 247 prisoners and it is estimated that an additional 46 enemy were killed. The company suffered 6 killed and 24 wounded during the three days of the action.

The company was the first element of the 2d Division to reach the final objective and was in position to continue the attack against the city wall, if orders had been received to do so. In this advance, the company benefited from the extensive artillery fire and air bombardment which

(27) Personal Knowledge.

had been made before the actual attack. The assistance rendered by the fighter bombers on the morning of 9 September 1944 was of great value and enabled the company to overcome with little effort what might have been the most troublesome enemy position encountered. However, had the company advanced more rapidly before reaching that position, it is possible that the air strike would have hit the enemy position after the company had reached it. Since the air identification panels were inadequate means of identification except under ideal circumstances, this contingency might have had disastrous results for the company. Certainly the company should have been informed that the air strike was scheduled. As it turned out, maximum benefits were derived from this unexpected support only because the platoon and squad leaders of the 1st and 3d platoons had sufficient initiative to capitalize upon it.

The assistance rendered the company by the attached supporting elements was a factor which contributed a great deal to the success of the operation. The machine gun platoon from D company hand carried their weapons during the entire attack and continually rendered close support to the attacking riflemen. In addition, the platoon leader of this machine gun platoon was continuously moving along the line of the advancing elements seeking out those points where assistance was needed.

The tank destroyer section was utilized for close direct fire support and in this role proved more than satisfactory. The establishment of close liaison between the company commander and the tank destroyer section leader enabled the section to deliver fire support promptly

whenever called upon.

The detailed preparation was a major contributing factor to the success of the attack. The enemy situation map which was published by VIII Corps G-2 was distributed to the attacking companies and it prevented those companies from being surprised when they encountered opposition. In B Company, each man was aware of the company mission and the part his squad and platoon would play in the accomplishment of that mission. This enabled the company to suffer losses of leaders without a break in the continuity of the attack.

While the factors outlined above contributed to the company's success, the major reason was the aggressive, determined leadership evidenced by the platoon and squad leaders. This was particularly true in the 3d platoon which actually did most of the fighting in which the company participated. In three days of constant attacking this platoon was never stopped except by orders from higher units. The 3d platoon sergeant was one of those rare individuals whose personal courage and initiative carry entire units forward. Largely because of the 3d platoon's aggressive action, the company had never lost the initiative and momentum it gained the first morning of the attack.

The enemy had made several serious blunders during the period of the attack. His position on 8 September 44 was not outposted and the 3d platoon reached assault position without receiving fire. Again that night, the column of enemy which marched into the light machine gun section had no security elements in front of it. He also neglected the counterattack as an element of defensive

combat.

A serious deficiency in map reading ability among enlisted men was illustrated during the attack. An investigation disclosed that the tank destroyer fire which struck the company observation post on the morning of 8 September 44 was caused when the platoon sergeant of the tank destroyer platoon attempted to hit targets which had been designated to him on his map, but not on the ground. The 1st platoon's loss of direction on the afternoon of the 10 September 44 was another example of a noncommissioned officer who could not read a map.

### LESSONS

Lessons emphasized during this operation include:

1. Use direct fire weapons such as tank destroyers instead of artillery for close support of the attacking elements in city fighting.
2. Point out targets, objectives, boundaries, and other terrain features to subordinate leaders on the ground.
3. Smoke can be used effectively to screen movements on the battlefield.
4. Supporting weapons must be prepared to deliver fire promptly when rifle squads and platoons need assistance.
5. Riflemen can and must move under their own fire cover. Even in close terrain this is usually the best cover available.
6. When properly utilized, air support is a tremendous asset to ground forces.
7. When air support is to be utilized, inform the attacking elements before it is delivered.

8. Aggressive leadership of small units is essential  
for success on the battlefield.

9. All units must provide their own security  
elements.